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**Dooley**

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(54) **ELECTRO-MAGNETICALLY ENHANCED CURRENT INTERRUPTER**

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**H01H 29/00** (2006.01)

PCT International Search Report, PCT CA2004, 001020—Mailed Sep. 23, 2004.

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337/145; 335/47, 49

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See application file for complete search history.

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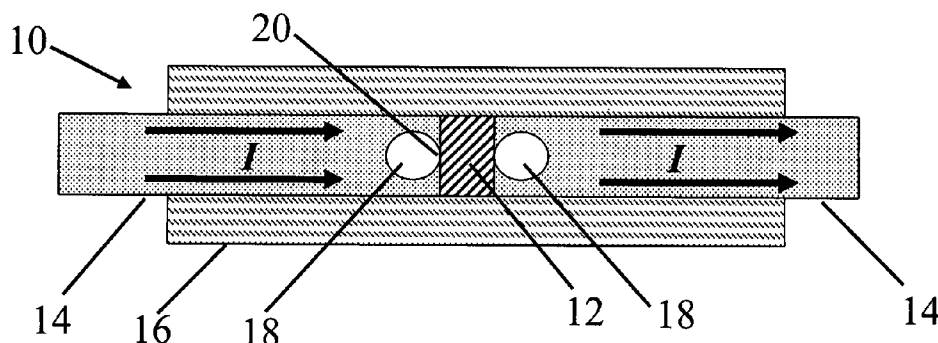
(57) **ABSTRACT**

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The present invention provides an apparatus and method of interrupting the current in a circuit wherein the magnetic pressure induced by current flow through a conductor causes the conductor to flow and thereby open the associated circuit. Magnetic pressure may be derived from Lorenz equations. Gravity is not relied upon to cause the conductor material to flow. The invention may be used in circuits having high currents relative to conductor size and material selection.

**12 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets**



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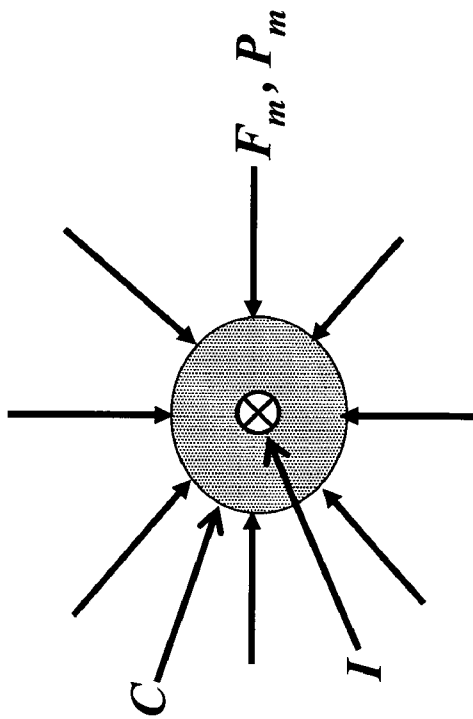


Figure 1

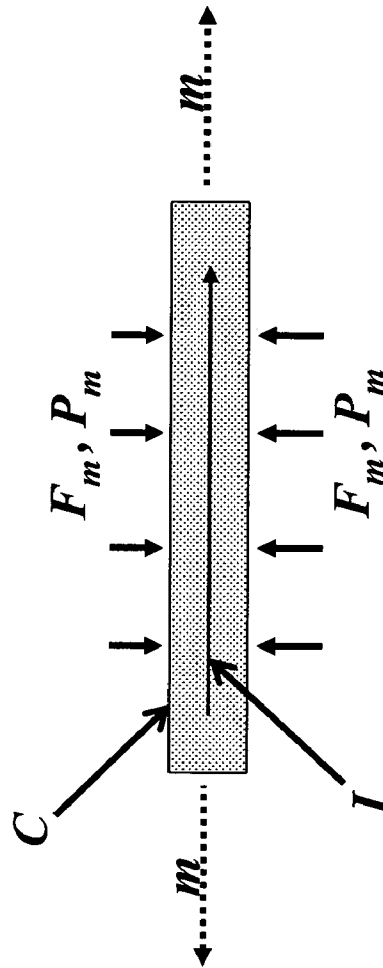
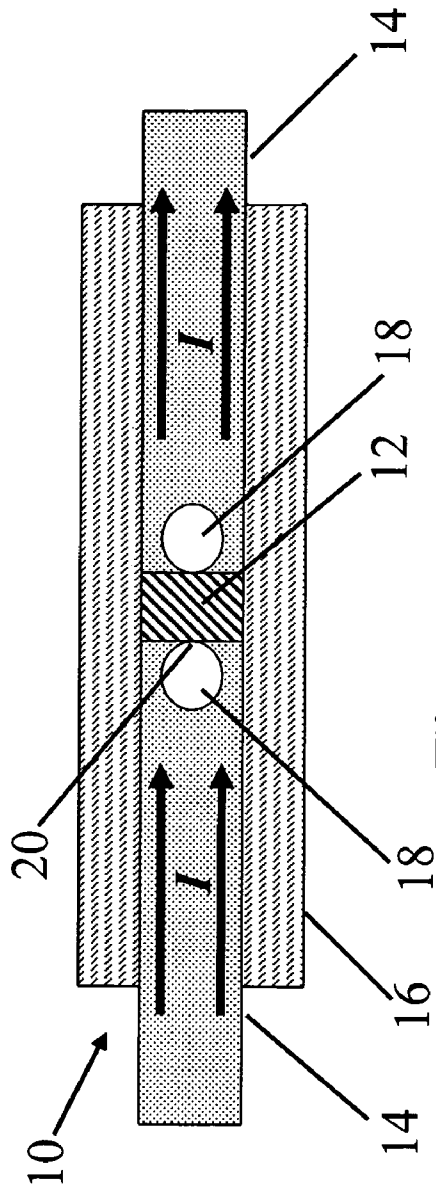
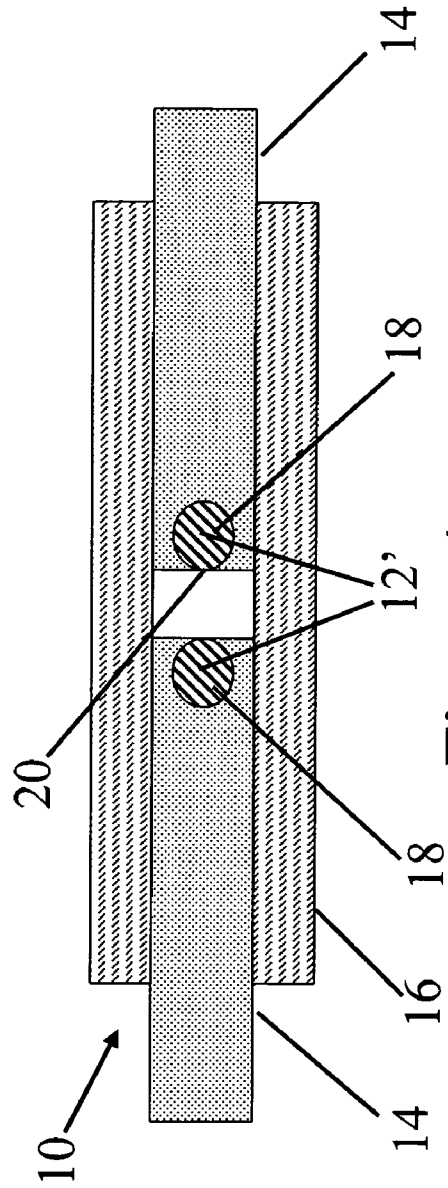


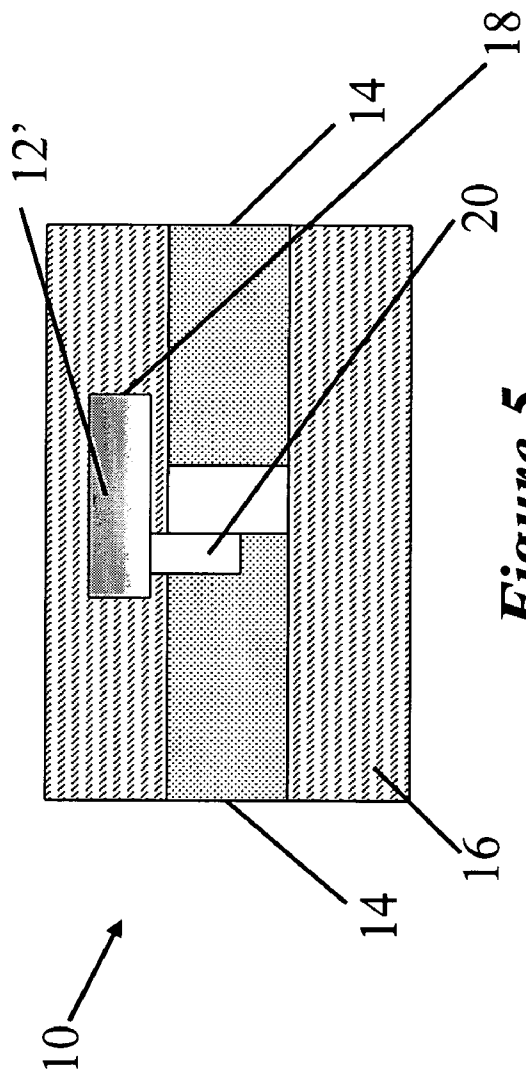
Figure 2



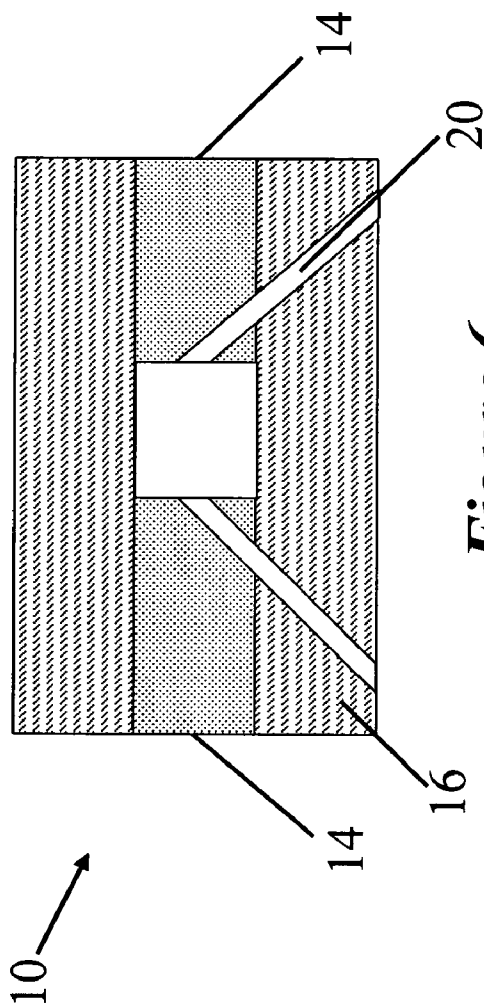
**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**

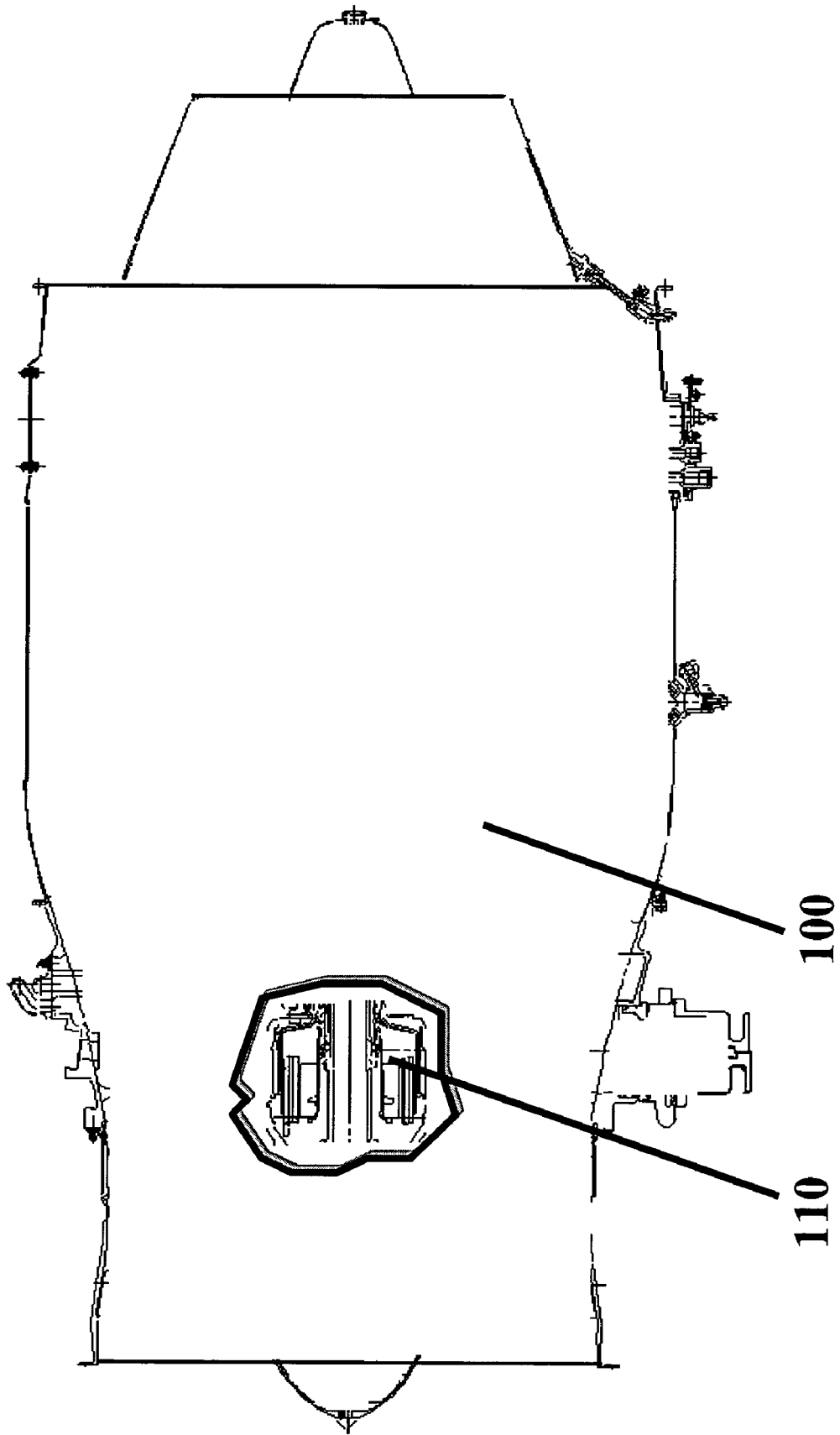
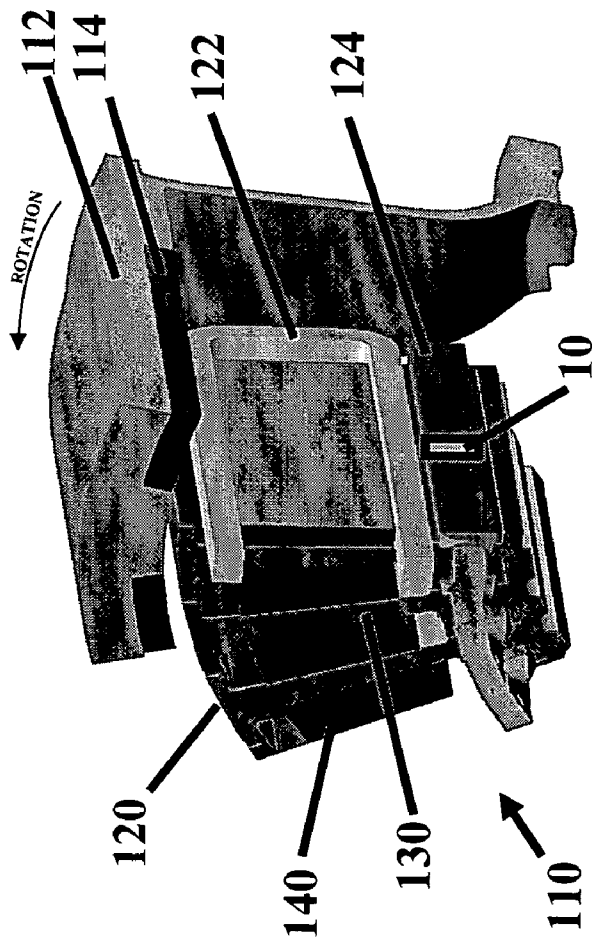
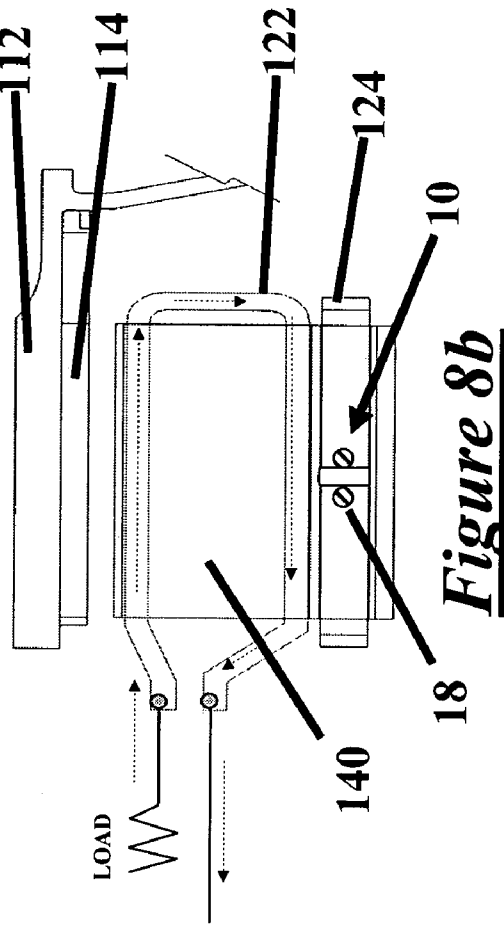


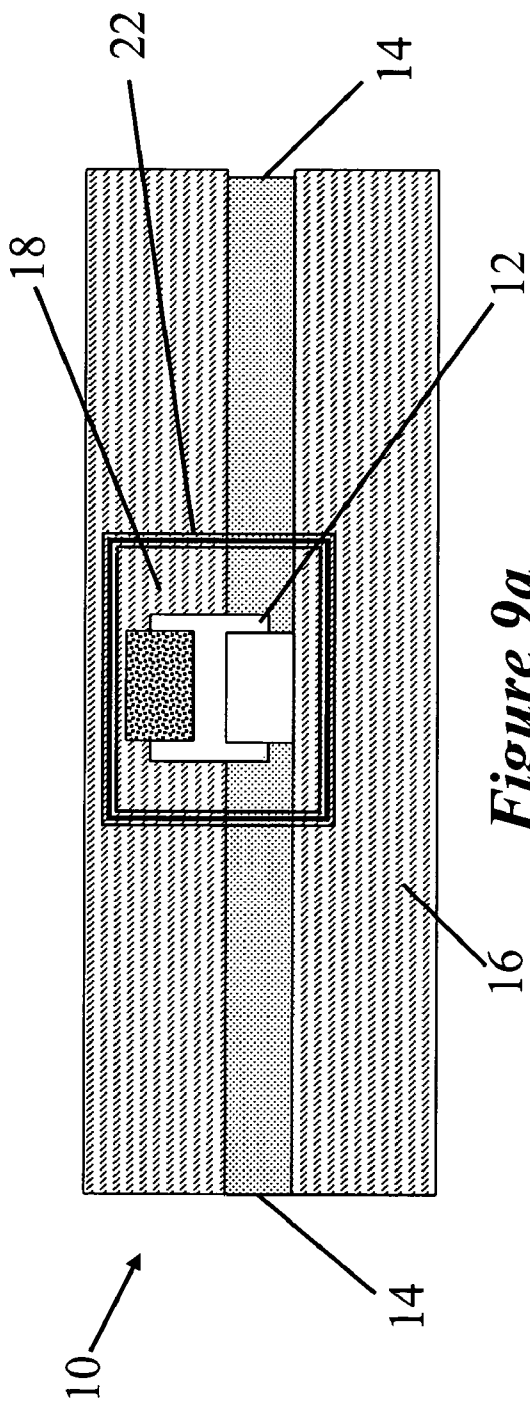
Figure 7



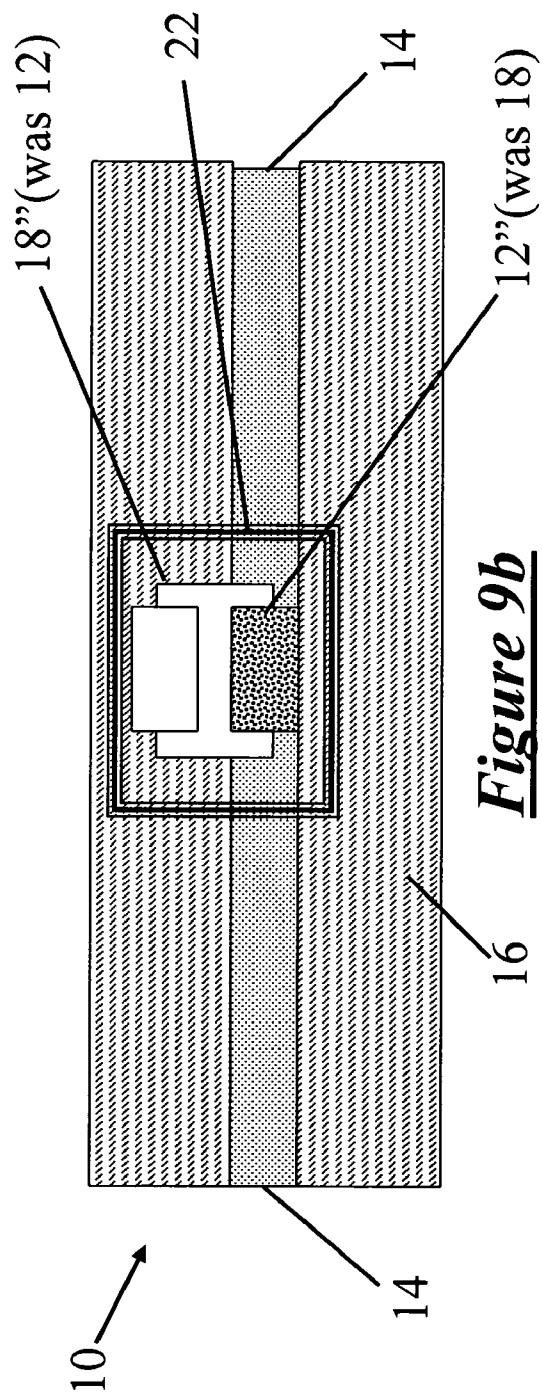
***Figure 8a***



***Figure 8b***



**Figure 9a**



**Figure 9b**



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**ELECTRO-MAGNETICALLY ENHANCED  
CURRENT INTERRUPTER****CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED U.S.  
APPLICATION**

This application is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/701,525 filed Nov. 6, 2003, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,023,307 which prior application is hereby incorporated by reference.

**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

The invention relates to a current interrupter for an electrical circuit, and in particular one which is well-suited for use with a high-current circuit.

**BACKGROUND**

A typical meltable fuse-type electrical interrupter includes a conductor portion which melts upon reaching a threshold current, the melting being caused by the increase in temperature associated with the current increase and the accompanying  $I^2R$  effect. Once melted, the molten conductor flows, as a result of gravity and/or surface tension, away from the related conductors and the fuse thereby opens the circuit. Devices of this sort are generally described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,368,452 to Kerr Jr. and U.S. Pat. No. 4,622,534 to Bowman.

Such fuse devices, however, are unsuitable for high current use. As currents increase, so too does the fusing temperature and, at very high currents, the fusing material will vaporize once the threshold current is reached, since the material cannot be removed from the vicinity quickly enough and electricity continues to flow through the molten conductor. Arcing results and, as arcing may continue to occur through the medium of the vapourized conductor, arc-extinguishing measures such as the provision for silica sand or a gas must be provided to permit the device to work as intended in high current circuits. The devices therefore often end up being complex, expensive, heavy and of decreased reliability.

Another drawback of the meltable fuse type interrupter is that gravity is relied upon to remove the melted conductor from the circuit to thereby open the circuit. In applications where fuse attitude or gravity may vary (e.g. airborne or space applications), these types of meltable fuses may also be unsuitable. Also, reliance on gravity slows response times. Accordingly, there is a need for improvements in interrupters, particularly for use in high current-carrying circuits and/or variable attitude applications, and it is an object of this invention to provide such a device.

**SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

In one aspect the invention provides a current interrupter for an electrical circuit, the interrupter adapted to open when a threshold current passes therethrough, the interrupter comprising a flowable conductor adapted for connection to the circuit, the conductor having a cross-sectional area, wherein the conductor cross-sectional area is sized relative to the threshold current such that a sufficient magnetic pressure is generated in the conductor to thereby force the conductor to flow, said flow being sufficient to thereby open the circuit. In a second aspect the invention provides a current interrupter for an electrical circuit, the interrupter adapted to open when a threshold current passes therethrough, the interrupter com-

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prising: pressure means for forcing a flowable conductor connected to the circuit to flow sufficiently to thereby open the circuit, said pressure means comprising a conductor and a threshold current, the conductor sized and composed of a material such that the threshold current passing through the conductor generates a temperature and a forcing pressure sufficient to force said flow, said forcing pressure having a greater motive effect on said flow than a gravitational effect on said flow. In another aspect, the invention provides a method of providing a current interrupter having at least a conductor adapted to be physically altered to thereby open an associated circuit when a threshold current from the circuit passes through the conductor, the method comprising the steps of: selecting a conductor material, the material having a flow temperature above which the conductor flows; selecting a conductor cross-section area; and determining said threshold current, wherein the threshold current is sufficient to raise a conductor temperature to at least the flow temperature at a location corresponding to the cross-section area, and wherein the threshold current induces sufficient pressure in the conductor to cause a sufficient amount of the conductor material to cause an open circuit. In another aspect, the invention provides a method of providing a current interrupter comprising the steps of: a) selecting an interrupter configuration having a conductor; b) selecting a material for the conductor, a cross-sectional area for the conductor and a desired threshold current at which current interruption is desired; c) determining a temperature above which the conductor is in a flowable state; d) determining a magnetic pressure associated with the threshold current passing through the conductor; e) determining a pressure required to cause the conductor to flow in the interrupter configuration when the conductor is in the flowable state; f) comparing the magnetic pressure with the pressure required to determine if the magnetic pressure exceeds the pressure required; and then g) providing an interrupter according to the selections made in steps a) and b), wherein in step f) if the magnetic pressure does not exceed the pressure required then at least one of steps a) and b) and at least one of steps c), d) and e) and at least step f) are iterated until a condition that the magnetic pressure exceeds the pressure required is met, and wherein the condition is met before step g) is performed. In yet another aspect, the invention provides a method of interrupting a current in a circuit when a threshold current passes through a conductor of the circuit, the method comprising the steps of: providing a conductor made of a conductor material; providing a current through the conductor, wherein the current is sufficient to raise the conductor temperature to a temperature at which the conductor material flows, and wherein the current is sufficient to induce a pressure large enough to cause the conductor to flow and thereby interrupt the circuit. In a further aspect, the invention provides a method of interrupting a current in a circuit when a threshold current passes through a conductor of the circuit, the method comprising the steps of providing a threshold current through the conductor; providing a flowable state to the conductor; and providing sufficient magnetic pressure in the conductor to cause the conductor flow accordingly and thereby interrupt the circuit, wherein the magnetic pressure is induced by current passing through the conductor. In another aspect, the invention provides a method of providing a current interrupter for a circuit, the method comprising the steps of: determining a desired threshold current; selecting a conductor material having a flow temperature above which the conductor will flow; selecting a conductor cross-sectional size; determining a magnetic pressure associated with the threshold current, the

conductor material and the conductor cross-sectional size; determining a threshold conductor temperature resulting from the threshold current passing through the conductor material; ensuring the conductor threshold temperature exceeds the conductor flow temperature; and ensuring that the magnetic pressure is sufficient when the threshold current passes through the conductor to thereby force the conductor material to flow to interrupt the circuit.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a better understanding of the present invention and to show more clearly how it may be carried into effect, reference will now be made by way of example to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIGS. 1 and 2 are schematic views of a simple conductor, viewed as lateral and axial cross-sections, respectively;

FIG. 3 is a schematic cross-sectional view of an embodiment of the present invention, shown in the "closed" state;

FIG. 4 is the device of FIG. 3, shown in the "open" state;

FIGS. 5 and 6 show alternate embodiments of the device of FIG. 3, both in the "open" state;

FIG. 7 is a side view of a gas turbine engine with a portion broken away to show an electric machine incorporating the present invention therein;

FIGS. 8a and 8b are enlarged partial isometric and cross-sectional views, respectively, of an example electric machine of FIG. 7; and

FIGS. 9a and 9b show a further alternate embodiment of the device of FIG. 3, in the "open" and "reset" positions, respectively.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The present invention makes use of a magnetic force related to current flow through a conductor, which may be used to move a such a conductor when in a molten or liquid state. Referring to FIG. 1, when a current I flows through a conductor C (in a direction into the page, in this example), magnetic forces  $F_m$  generated as a result of current flow through the conductor act on the conductor in a constrictive and compressive direction. Referring to FIG. 2, the net force acting on the conductor results pressure  $P_m$  within conductor C which tends to want to cause flowing of the conductor in a direction m generally normal to the direction of  $F_m$ , in this case, an axially outward direction. The pressure  $P_m$  can be derived from Lorenz equations and may be expressed simply as

$$P_m = I^2 * K * \mu / \pi R^2 \quad (\text{Equation 1})$$

where,  $P_m$  is pressure [Pa], I is current [A],  $K = \mu_0 / 4\pi$  (where  $\mu_0$  is the permeability of free space, or 1.257e-6),  $\mu$  is the permeability of the conductor relative to  $\mu_0$  at its melted condition, and  $\pi R^2$  is the cross-sectional area of the conductor [ $m^2$ ] (where R is the radius of the conductor [m]).

#### EXAMPLE 1

A 0.080 inch (2 mm) diameter conductor with a permeability  $\mu=1.0$  will develop a magnetic pressure of about 4 psi (27.5 kPa) at 1000 A.

#### EXAMPLE 2

A 0.062x0.125 inch (1.5x3 mm) lead-silver solder conductor material (melting temperature 315° C.) connected to

adjacent copper conductors (i.e. in a configuration like that shown in FIG. 3) can be made to rupture according to the present invention at approximately 800 A.

The force  $F_m$  and the pressure  $P_m$  is greatest at the core of the conductor, while this force and pressure at the outer periphery is zero. Thus the net effect is a axial pumping effect on a liquid conductor, which tends to squeeze the conductor in a manner roughly analogous to a tube of toothpaste being squeezed around its circumference. At normal current levels, the  $F_m$  forces are not easily measured nor are they influential on the conductor, however, when the conductor is a fluid (e.g. a melted metal) and  $P_m$  is sufficiently high, the magnetic pressure developed as a result can result in motion or flowing of the fluid which the inventor has found may be used in constructing the present interrupter.

The inventor has found that material selection and design configuration will permit the designer to methodically employ the current flow and magnetic interaction in the conductor to 'pinch' or 'pump' a molten conductive fluid, such as a melted link element in an electrical interrupter, to thereby open the associated circuit when a certain threshold current is reached, as will be described further below. In this way, the adverse effects associated with vapourization of prior art fuses can be avoided, since the link material is substantially 'pumped' away before its temperature is elevated to a vapourization temperature. When the current flowing through the conductor is high enough to cause the link material to reach the melting temperature, the core of the now molten conductor tends to flow outward, in both axial directions (see FIG. 2), resulting in a reduction in the diameter of the conductive path. Referring again to Equation 1, it becomes apparent that the motive force  $F_m$  or pressure  $P_m$  will be inversely proportional to the square of the conductor radius such that, for example, when the conductor radius is diminished by half, the motive pressure increase 4 times, and so on. This results in an ever accelerating flow of the material out of the conduction path. Such an interrupter therefore minimizes the effect of arcing and vapourization simply and by design.

Referring to FIG. 3, an embodiment of an electrical interrupter 10 according to the present invention is shown. The interrupter 10 includes a melttable (preferably) metal link 12 which adjoins two adjacent conductors 14, for conducting current therebetween, and an insulated sleeve 16 surrounding both the conductors 14 and the link 12. Adjacent the link 12 is at least one, and preferably at least two reservoirs 18. Reservoirs 18 are preferably empty in the initial 'closed' state, and are preferably sized to have the same or larger volume as the volume of link 12 in its melted state, as will be described in more detail below. Reservoirs 18 are preferably closely located to link 12 and in fluid communication therewith, and more preferably communicate with link 12 via openings or connecting passages 20 provided to permit fluid communication for molten link material 12' between link 12 and reservoirs 18. Passages 20 preferably communicate with the core or centremost portion of link 12 since, as mentioned above, this is the region of highest pressure  $P_m$ . Passages 20 are also preferably themselves non-conductive so as not to be subjected their own magnetic pressure effect as a result of current conducted therethrough. Conductors 14 are adapted for connection to an electrical circuit (not shown) in any suitable manner. The reservoirs may be empty in their initial state, or may contain a fluid, such as an arc suppressing fluid, cooling oil or other

fluid, which is either displaced by the conductor, or pumped into the conductor's original position, or mixed with the conductor, etc.

In the described embodiment, conductors **14** are of preferably generally rectangular cross-section and are made of copper (any suitable cross-section and conductor material may be used). Link **12** is preferably also of generally rectangular cross-section in this embodiment and is preferably made of a eutectic material, and more preferably Indalloy #182 (a trade mark of the Indium Corporation) having a formulation of 80% Au (Gold) 20% Sn (Tin) and a melting temperature of 280° C. Referring again to Equation 1, Indalloy #182 has a permeability  $\mu$  of 1.0 (whereas conductive materials containing iron or nickel would be greater than 1). Link **12** and conductors **14** are joined by any suitable means. The link material is selected generally based on its melting temperature corresponding to the selected threshold current, though mechanical properties and oxidation resistance are also desirable to consider. The conductor material is preferably selected, among other things, to remain in its solid state until the threshold current is reached. A eutectic metal material is preferred for its well-controlled melting point and its strong mechanical material properties, however while eutectic materials are preferred, other materials may also be used. It is also possible to design the interrupter **10** to operate based on a pre-selected current, as is presently done with prior art fuses, using power dissipation and heat balance/conduction to the environment to set the temperature at a particular current. Equation 1 will be relevant in selecting the conductor material for link **12**.

Reservoirs **18** are preferably two in number and generally cylindrical holes or voids in conductors **14**, the volume of these cylinders preferably being approximately equal to or larger than the calculated volume of link **12** when in its molten state. Reservoirs **18** are preferably cut or punched into conductors **14** after conductors **14** have been assembled to link **12**, though any method of providing them may be used.

In use, in normal operating conditions, the current  $I$  (indicated by the arrows in FIG. 3) flowing through the electrical circuit (not shown) passes into interrupter **10** through a first conductor **14**, around a first reservoir **18**, through link **12**, around a second reservoir **18** and then through a second conductor **14** and then to the remainder of the circuit. In the event of a current increase in the circuit, the high current flow generates increased heat and magnetic forces in the conductors in current path. Referring to FIG. 4, when the current  $I$  is high enough to reach a threshold current  $I_{threshold}$ , that is, sufficient to generate just enough heat and temperature rise to melt the link **12**, the pressure on the circumference of link **12** resulting from the magnetic forces caused by  $I_{threshold}$  causes the molten metal **12'** of link **12** to be forced under the action of this pressure (see Equation 1) into the spaces provided by reservoirs **18**, thereby resulting in a break in the circuit, and thus opening the circuit and preventing current flow. Cooling occurring after the circuit opens results in re-solidification of the link material **12'**, but in this embodiment the configuration is such that cooling does not allow the fuse to return to a current-conducting state. Note in FIG. 4 that the location of reservoirs **18** need not allow for a gravity feed of link material **12'**, since gravity is not relied upon in the operation of the interrupter **10**.

As mentioned, the present current interrupter takes advantage of an induced pressure to cause the conductor to flow so as to open the associated circuit. Consequently, interrupter **10** should be designed taking expected pressures

under consideration, as well as temperatures and conductor state, to ensure that sufficient pressure is provided to cause the conductor to move by flowing. The designer will generally consider the heat generated in the conductor at a given current, the melting point of the conductor, and the pressure losses to be overcome in moving the melted conductor. Pressure considerations which may affect the design include surface tension of the molten conductor, capillary action and viscous losses, as well as losses due to interrupter geometry. The interrupter design is then provided to ensure that both (a) the conductor is in a flowable state, preferably a liquid state, at temperatures corresponding to a desired threshold, and (b) sufficient magnetic pressure is generated to overcome the calculated pressure losses and thereby cause the conductor to flow accordingly (see Equation 1 and Example 1).

As mentioned, the magnetic pressure depends in part on the diameter of the conductor. Therefore, it will be understood that as the cross-sectional area of the conductor is reduced (i.e. as conductor material is 'pumped' away), the magnetic pressure  $P_m$  increases at a given current, by the square of the ratio of diameters. Therefore, as conductor flow progresses (it will not generally be instantaneous), magnetic pressure increases. Referring again to Example 1, when the volume of fluid is at the half way point in Example 1, the pressure will be 16 psi (100 kPa). The designer may therefore take advantage of this behavior to ensure that just enough magnetic pressure and flowable conductor is present to initiate cross-section reduction, after which the corresponding pressure increases will 'kick' the rest of the process. Though pressure is dependent on conductor size, material, etc. the magnetic pressure may be as low as 0.1 or 0.2 psi (0.7 or 1.2 kPa, respectively), or lower.

It will be understood that FIG. 4 represents an idealized circumstance in which all of link **12** is melted and flows into reservoirs **18**. In practice, however, all that is required in the present invention is that a sufficient amount of link **12** melt and be forced away from adjacent conductor or conductors **14** in an suitable manner to thereby open the interrupter **10** and, thereby, the associated circuit. In practice, the material of conductors **14** may also decay to some extent.

In another embodiment, depicted in FIG. 5, a single reservoir **18'** is provided in a different location, and reservoir **18'** is larger than the volume of melted link **12**. A connecting passage **20** is provided to provide fluid communication for molten link material **12'** between link **12** and reservoir **18'**. Note that the reservoir **18** need not be on the 'bottom' side (i.e. closer to the earth) of link **12**, since gravity is not a determining factor in the operation of the present invention.

Referring to FIG. 6, in yet another embodiment, reservoir **18** is absent altogether, and link material **12'** (not shown) is permitted to be pumped away from the original position of link **12**. Again, despite the location of passages **20**, the fuse of FIG. 6 can be made to operate satisfactorily in any attitude, since gravity is not relied upon by the present invention.

The present system is an active system which overcomes the drawbacks of prior art passive systems, such as fluid viscosity effects and gravity-feed which result in significantly slower response times. The present invention is therefore particularly well-suited for use with relatively high current circuits which do not require fast fusing (i.e. slow blow fuses). When the device is provided such that the threshold current is sufficiently high, the magnetic pressure at this current will be sufficient to cause the described magnetic phenomenon to 'pump' the melted link as described. At lower currents, the pressure induced will be

insufficient to achieve the described result. However, referring again to Equation 1, it will also be understood that what constitutes a ‘high’ current is dependent on conductor size and composition, among other things. Therefore, applicability of the device is not limited to traditional notions of ‘high current’, and with the continual development of nanotechnology, the lower current limit to which this invention is applicable may not yet be known.

The present invention is particularly well suited, among other things, to application to protecting an electric machine from damage caused by internal short circuiting. Referring to FIG. 7, such an electric machine **119** is shown in a starter-generator application for a gas turbine engine **100**.

Referring to FIG. **8a**, the current limiting device **10**, may be used beneficially in the secondary or control winding of a permanent magnet alternator of the type described in the applicant’s co-pending application Ser. No. 10/444,952, filed 27 May 2003, the contents of which are incorporated by reference into this disclosure. Briefly, FIG. **8a** shows interrupter **10** according to the present invention provided in one or more legs **142** (preferably all legs) of a secondary winding **124**. As described fully in the incorporated reference, in use, as rotor **112** rotates around stator **120**, magnets **114** induce a current in primary winding **122**. The presence and interaction of primary winding **122**, secondary winding **124** and bridge **140** extending between adjacent stator teeth **130** also causes an induced current flow in secondary winding **124**. Referring to FIG. **8b**, in use, when the current in secondary winding **124** exceeds a certain threshold, an interrupter element **10** will “open”, by link **12** melting, and link material **12’** flowing into reservoirs **18** as described above, and interrupter **10** thereby creating an open-circuit in secondary winding (i.e. no secondary current) and, by reason of the electrical inter-relationship between the primary and secondary circuits, the output current of primary winding **122** will be appropriately controlled. Consequently inductive reactance of the machine is increased, which can be used to limit maximum output current to a maximum synchronous impedance of machine **110**. Thus, interrupter **10** can be used in the control of the machine’s impedance and in providing machine **110** intrinsic thermal protection against a short-circuit in primary winding **122** when operating in an alternator mode.

The present invention also presents the designer with various options in design, unlike the prior art. For example, if for some reason an electrical device including interrupter **10** is operating at normal or low load currents (i.e. there is no electrical fault), but there is a fault which causes overheating in the device (e.g. an interruption of coolant or a very high coolant temperature), the configuration of interrupter **10** may permit the link **12** to melt and escape and thereby open the circuit to stop operation of the device even though no electrical fault is present. Such operation would of course not have the benefit of the magnetic pressure  $P_m$  caused by an appropriate current level, but nonetheless permits the designer flexibility in providing thermal protection to the device. Conversely, the designer may provide a configuration in which link **12** does not flow to open the circuit unless there is a sufficient current present to ‘pump’ away the molten conductor, and in this way the designer may intentionally permit the device to run “hot” as long as a threshold current is not exceeded. In yet another situation, the designer may provide cooling to link **12** to reduce the operating temperature of link **12** even though a current passing through link **12** exceeds an ‘uncooled’ threshold for

link **12**, which thereby gives the designer flexibility in selecting when and at what current interrupter **10** will operate to open the circuit.

Referring again to FIG. **5**, another feature of the present interrupter is that it may be provided in a configuration which is automatically intrinsically re-settable. The conductor material may be heated or reheated such that the molten material may flow back to its original location to reconstitute link **12**. Gravity feed may be used, or more preferably, a driving current is used to expulse the conductor material from the reservoir **18** and back into its original location as link **12**. Since oxidation, etc. would likely be an issue in such re-settable devices, an oxygen-free environment is preferably provided.

Referring to FIGS. **9a** and **9b**, in yet another embodiment, link **12** and reservoir **18** are provided in a re-settable cartridge **22** such that, once interrupter **10** is opened in operation (FIG. **9a**), cartridge **22** may be repositioned, for example by manual removal and rotation in this example, to reset interrupter **10** by switching the locations of link **12** and reservoir **18**, such that their functions and positions are reversed as shown in FIG. **9b**. Automatic repositioning means (not shown) may alternately be provided.

Advantageously, with the present invention vapourization of the whole link does not occur as in prior art melting fuse-type interrupters and, therefore, the melt temperature and thus response time can be better predicted in design. In a standard prior art fuse, the overcurrent condition raises the temperature of the fuse material to its fusing or melting temperature. As the temperature increases, the resistance of the material also increases causing an increasing power dissipation in the material ( $I^2R$ ), which causes an increase in temperature and so on. Thus, the prior art fuse is driving itself to ever higher temperatures at an ever accelerating rate until the power dissipation is reduced or eliminated. At some point, a break occurs in the conductive path, which typically causes an arc, particularly in relatively high current situations. This causes local vapourization of the conductor which facilitates sustaining the arc, which spreads away from the initial break point vapourizing more material as it progresses, until the voltage needed to sustain a current flow through the now long arc is not available from the external circuit, and the arc becomes quenched. Thus vapourization and arcing are relatively uncontrolled in the prior art, and thus response time and operability is adversely affected. The present invention provides an active pumping effect to minimize the effect of vapourization on arcing, and minimize arcing, which improves (i.e. reduces) responses time.

Another advantage is that the interrupter according to the present invention may be provided, by design, with an electrical resistance which is lower than possible in the prior art because the initial cross-section of the link **12** (i.e. initial conduction area) has less influence on the threshold current than prior art fuses, because the conduction area is reduced as the link **12** progressively melts.

The above description is meant to be exemplary only, and one skilled in the art will recognize and changes may be made to the embodiments described without departing from the scope of the invention disclosed. For example, the reservoir(s) need not be empty prior to the fuse activating, but rather the reservoirs may be filled with another material which vacates the reservoirs upon fuse activation, or otherwise is able to admit a sufficient volume of the link **12** to permit interrupter **10** to open the circuit. The function of the reservoir may be served by any means which permits the conductor to be moved away from its initial position to thereby open the circuit. Insulator **16** need not be provided,

or may be altered as desired. The link **12** may only partially melt to activate interrupter **10**. One or more links **12** may be provided in interrupter **10**, of the same or different materials, as desired, arranged in parallel or in serial, as desired. Interrupter **10** need not have a linear shape, nor the rudimentary geometric configuration described, but rather any suitable fuse configuration may be used. Although a melt-able solid conductor is discussed through, a suitable conductor which flows in response to magnetic pressure may be used. And although preferred, the threshold current need not be the means by which the conductor is provided in a flowable state, as alternate methods of providing a flowable conductor are available, such as providing separate heating means or providing a conductor which is otherwise independently in a flowable state. Application of the present principles is certainly not limited to the control of electric machines or use on aircraft. Still other modifications will be apparent to those skilled in the art, in light of a review of this disclosure which do not fall outside the scope of what was invented, and therefore such modifications are intended to fall within the scope of the appended claims, and their respective equivalents.

I claim:

**1.** A method of providing a current interrupter having at least a conductor adapted to be physically altered to thereby open an associated circuit when a threshold current from the circuit passes through the conductor, the method comprising the steps of:

selecting a conductor material, the material having a flow temperature above which the conductor flows;  
selecting a conductor cross-section area; and  
determining said threshold current,

wherein the threshold current is sufficient to raise a conductor temperature to at least the flow temperature at a location corresponding to the cross-section area, and wherein the threshold current induces sufficient magnetic pressure in the conductor to cause a sufficient amount of the conductor material to cause an open circuit.

**2.** The method of claim **1** further comprising the step of selecting said induced pressure to at least overcome a pressure loss associated with the conductor flowing.

**3.** A method of providing a current interrupter comprising the steps of:

- a) selecting an interrupter configuration having a conductor;
- b) selecting a material for the conductor, a cross-sectional area for the conductor and a desired threshold current at which current interruption is desired;
- c) determining a temperature above which the conductor is in a flowable state;
- d) determining a magnetic pressure associated with the threshold current passing through the conductor;
- e) determining a pressure required to cause the conductor to flow in the interrupter configuration when the conductor is in the flowable state;
- f) comparing the magnetic pressure with the pressure required to determine if the magnetic pressure exceeds the pressure required; and then
- g) providing an interrupter according to the selections made in steps a) and b),

wherein in step f) if the magnetic pressure does not exceed the pressure required then at least one of steps a) and b) and at least one of steps c), d) and e) and at least step f) are iterated until a condition that the magnetic pressure exceeds the pressure required is met, and wherein the condition is met before step g) is performed.

**4.** A method of interrupting a current in a circuit when a threshold current passes through a conductor of the circuit, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a conductor made of a conductor material;  
providing a current through the conductor, wherein the current is sufficient to raise the conductor temperature to a temperature at which the conductor material flows, and wherein the current is sufficient to induce a magnetic pressure large enough to cause the conductor to flow and thereby interrupt the circuit.

**5.** A method of interrupting a current in a circuit when a threshold current passes through a conductor of the circuit, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a threshold current through the conductor;  
providing a flowable state to the conductor; and  
providing sufficient magnetic pressure in the conductor to cause the conductor flow accordingly and thereby interrupt the circuit, wherein the magnetic pressure is induced by current passing through the conductor.

**6.** The current interrupter of claim **5** wherein the magnetic pressure exceeds 0.1 psi.

**7.** The current interrupter of claim **6** wherein the magnetic pressure exceeds 0.5 psi.

**8.** The current interrupter of claim **7** wherein the magnetic pressure exceeds 1 psi.

**9.** The method of claim **5**, wherein the step of providing the threshold current causes an associated temperature rise in the conductor, and wherein the temperature rise causes the step of providing the flowable state to the conductor.

**10.** The method of claim **5** wherein material from the flowing conductor is captured in a reservoir.

**11.** The method of claim **5**, wherein the conductor flows substantially independent of a gravitational effect on the flowable conductor.

**12.** A method of providing a current interrupter for a circuit, the method comprising the steps of:

determining a desired threshold current;  
selecting a conductor material having a flow temperature above which the conductor will flow;  
selecting a conductor cross-sectional size;  
determining a magnetic pressure associated with the threshold current, the conductor material and the conductor cross-sectional size;  
determining a threshold conductor temperature resulting from the threshold current passing through the conductor material;  
ensuring the conductor threshold temperature exceeds the conductor flow temperature; and  
ensuring that the magnetic pressure is sufficient when the threshold current passes through the conductor to thereby force the conductor material to flow to interrupt the circuit.